

Matthew 27:62-66
Good Friday
Sermon Series: Ironies of the Passion
He Said, “I Will Rise Again”

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
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These past six weeks, as we’ve followed Jesus along His path to the cross, we’ve been focusing on the Ironies of His Passion. The next time we meet, on Sunday morning, we’ll begin a new focus, as we delve into the glorious truths of Easter. I think it’s fitting that this is the last stop on our expedition through the ironies of the passion because our text tonight is absolutely filled with irony including, not surprisingly, Jesus’ enemies once again unwittingly saying something that turned out to be true in the way they least expected.

Let’s turn our attention now to those words from Matthew 27: **62 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63 “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64 So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”**

65 “Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

The first piece of irony tonight is the grouping of characters we’re introduced to. By now, this pairing of the chief priests and the Pharisees, or teachers of the law, has become rather familiar. As we read through the Gospel accounts of Holy Week and the few months leading up to it, we almost get the idea that the chief priests and the teachers of the law were a team—always together, always united. In reality though, that idea couldn’t be farther from the truth. In actuality, the chief priests who were members of the Sadducee party and the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw eye to eye on very little. Without getting too deep into Jewish politics, suffice it to say they were at far greater odds than the Republicans and Democrats here in the US.

In fact, the only event we have on record that garnered bipartisan support from the Pharisees and the Sadducees is the effort to put Jesus of Nazareth to death. Even that had not gone according to plan for them. They had wound up having to kill Jesus at the least opportune moment, right in the middle of the Passover festival while Jerusalem was teeming with visitors. But it was done. Jesus was dead. And thankfully, two of their number had taken it on themselves to bury Jesus’ body before the Sabbath began. So it was done. They could finally wash their hands of this whole Jesus ordeal. Except for one problem: while He was alive, Jesus had said that on the third day He would rise again. So off they went to Pilate.

Matthew tells us it was now the day following the Day of Preparation, in other words, it was now the Sabbath. In Jewish tradition, the new day begins at sundown rather than at sunup so in all likelihood the events of our text are taking place on what we would consider to be Friday night, just after Jesus had been removed from the cross and buried in the tomb.

Now you may recall from our Scripture readings a few weeks back, that when the Jews had brought Jesus to trial before Pilate less than twenty-four hours earlier, they made a point of insisting that Pilate come and meet them outside. They didn’t want to become “unclean” by entering the home of a Gentile so close to this high festival day. But now, on that high festival day, when there was no crowd to impress they don’t seem to have any issue meeting with Pilate.

We see the irony too, as they address Pilate as “sir” or literally “lord,” and refer to Jesus, who truly was their Lord, as “that imposter.” So after buttering Pilate up, they get to the point: **Lord, we remembered that while He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I rise.’ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, His disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that He has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.**

They said that their fear was that the disciples would come and steal Jesus’ body away at night which, again, is rather ironic. The disciples, as we know, were gathered together somewhere in Jerusalem hiding, for fear of what might happen to them now that Jesus was dead. The idea that these men who were too cowardly to stand up for Jesus while He was alive would be so bold as to risk stealing His body now that He was dead seems pretty unlikely. I think that would have been apparent to Pharisees and Sadducees as well. It may well be that they were actually afraid that Jesus would come through on His word and rise again. Whether that was the case or not, they certainly weren’t going to admit it to Pilate. Pilate consented to their request and gave them a guard. **Make the tomb as secure as you know how,** he said. So they went, sealed the tomb, and posted the guard in front of it.

All of this concern and effort—the worrying, the planning, the preparations—what did it all achieve? Despite their intentions, the only thing their actions ensured was to make it perfectly clear when the tomb was opened on Sunday morning and Jesus was already gone, that no foul play had been involved. All they had accomplished was to lend further testimony to the fact that Jesus is indeed risen from the dead. Despite all they did, God’s plan won out. We see that message loud and clear through all the events that transpired on that Good Friday.

God’s plan—Jesus’ plan—was that He would die. His death does not translate to Him being defeated. While it was a tragedy of inhuman proportions, it remains His greatest victory. Jesus’ death is God’s love made manifest—His grace put into action—because Jesus suffered everything that happened to Him on Good Friday for us. The cross He hung on is the cross upon which we deserve to hang. The abandonment of the Father He endured is the abandonment from God which ought to have been ours. His death is the punishment that we brought on, the wages our sins have earned.

That is what sin does to us. If you’re ever tempted to think that your sins aren’t really a big deal, stop yourself and look at the cross. This is how seriously God takes our sin. God looks into our hearts, and what does He see? He sees sinful thoughts, sinful desires, and sinful feelings all of which have shown themselves through our words and actions. When God looks at us, He sees sin which can only be answered by His righteous punishment, by death and separation from His love. You might not like hearing that, but on Good Friday, it’s undeniable. On Good Friday, we see the awful punishment our sins deserve—as Jesus suffers, dies, and is buried in a tomb.

But in that tragic death of God’s Son, we see our salvation. Isaiah’s words which we read earlier tonight assure us that **He took up our pain; He bore our suffering; He was pierced for our transgressions; and by His wounds, we are healed.** And the story doesn’t end there with Jesus dead and buried in a tomb. The guard and seal would not have the final say. Instead, they served only to further God’s purpose, proving that Jesus’ body had not been stolen but that He had truly risen!

Because He rose, we know that the suffering, death, and hell that He endured was enough. With His blood, Jesus paid the price for all our sins. With His death, He redeemed us. His resurrection serves as our order confirmation, our receipt which proves our debt is paid in

full. So although our bodies too will die and be laid to rest in tombs of their own, we now that our story doesn't end there. For we know that when our earthly eyelids close, we will be taken from this world to the glorious light and splendor and majesty of heaven, safe forever in our Savior's arms.

To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood—to Him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.